

HOW IN LITERARY TRANSLATION, THE TARGET LANGUAGE'S CULTURE AFFECTS THE TRANSLATOR'S OBJECTIVITY, AND THE DIFFICULTIES, CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS THE TRANSLATOR ENCOUNTERS IN LITERARY AND MEDIA TRANSLATION, SPECIFICALLY IN THE TRANSLATION OF MIDDLE EASTERN LANGUAGES

Cómo afectan en la traducción literaria la cultura de la lengua y la objetividad del traductor: las dificultades, los desafíos y los dilemas con los que se encuentra el traductor en la traducción literaria y de medios, específicamente en la traducción de idiomas del Medio Oriente

Ally GILBOA

Founder and CEO AQ Group – Language Solutions

info@aqenglish.com

ABSTRACT: Today, with the acceleration of globalization, there is a growing demand for translations on various international issues requiring a unique multicultural translation tailored to each audience in its target language. Complications arise particularly in the literary and media fields in sensitive areas such as the Middle East. The main purpose of this paper is to show how translators deal with the objectivity of literary and media translation when it contradicts their personal values. The proposal shows data and findings collected through case studies, and interviews with the translators in the field and analyzed according to the «Grounded Theory» model and the «Integrated Approach» based on the Gestalt principle. Research findings shows some factors that influence the translator work and his objectivity. In conclusion, the translator has to learn how to maintain objectivity and keep his own personal values at bay during the process of translation.

Key words: translator, objectivity, culture, literary, translation

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to advances in communication technology and mass media, the world has been changed into a small village. As a result, there is increased demand for translations of international issues and multicultural texts, especially in the literary field and mass media.

In the long history of Translation Studies, the emphasis has always been on the transitional process between the SL and TL¹, and their comparison. The general expectation is that the translation should give a complete transcript of the ideas of the original work while the style and the manner of writing

1 Abbreviations: SL: Source language; TL: Target language.

should be of the same character as that of the original (Tytler, 2007). In this case, the translator is not encouraged to become involved in the reproduction. He is told to be as free as possible from personal intrusions; he is warned not to «distort the message to fit his own intellectual and emotional outlook»; he is required to minimize «ego-involvement» (Nida, 1993).

Consequently, the personal elements affecting the translator are overlooked, and his creativity is correspondingly prohibited. In addition, numerous criteria such as *equivalence* and *faithfulness* are put forward by translation theorists. These theories suggest that translators should behave like «transparent glass», reflecting in the translated text all the elements of the original. The translator is expected to be *invisible* as much as possible so that the original text and the original writer can be more *visible* to the readers (Venuti, 1995). However, all activities have their own subjects, and translation is no exception. Translators are the subjects of translation, and their subjectivity deserves scholars' notice. It must be realized that the whole process of translation cannot be completely free from the translator's influence.

Recent studies have indicated a change in a new paradigm in Translation Studies, whereas the role of translators is examined not only in terms of who they are but also in terms of their subjective impact on the work they translate. Despite new developments on the difficulty of translating literary work objectively, little insight has been shown in terms of the extent to which the translator's subjectivity affects the text. However, this insight into the subjectivity of the translator is important, especially in situations where critics vaguely evaluate literary translations as subjective without knowing why and how subjective they are because of the translators.

Lawrence Venuti claims that translations may cause scandals and these scandals may be cultural, economic or political (Venuti, 1995). He explains that linguistics-oriented approaches escaped such scandals since they did not consider social values. He believes that these approaches have limitations in translation and such restrictions are mostly visible in literary translation. Their restrictions stem from their being distant from the cultural and social formation of the topic. They do not seem to have taken any account of the influential factors related to the translator that exert a direct and crucial influence on the process of his translation.

Baydan examined a translation of the list of Western classics recommended for primary school children by the Turkish Ministry of Education which the public claimed to be distorted ideologies and accused the translators of being influenced by conservative religious ideology (Baydan, 2008). She claimed that there was no «ideology-free» translation and that the ideology in translation should be parallel to the ideology of the original text, otherwise it would be a distortion.

Globalization also touches the literary field, and here the problem lies in what happens when intercultural interactions occur in the translator as he transmits the messages of a book from SL to TL when these originate from different cultures. In literary translations, there is a strong relationship between language and culture from various aspects: sociological, psychological and linguistic. Therefore, the translator must be aware of these aspects when he translates texts from SL to TL.

Translation is a dynamic and complex process during which the translator acts as a reader of the source text and the writer of the target text, inevitably adding something subjective or erasing something during translation. Since the literary translation has more cultural and social elements, the translator must choose between loyalty to violation and freedom to restraint when dealing with conflicts between the original language culture and the target language culture where he may be influenced by his personal factors related to his own world.

It is especially difficult for the translator to deal with more complex statements when the translation opens up a variety of possibilities, and one of them is a simple one-time translation. Only one right translation into another language does not exist (Cappai, 2003). As a result, the translator must decide between different but equally qualified options.

The question this study examines is how translators address literary and media translation objectivity when the text contradicts their own personal values or point of view.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study applies qualitative research as its aim is to garner an in-depth understanding of translators' behavior and the factors that govern such behavior. The researcher also examines the phenomenon as a subject/participant, as she is also a translator who observes other translators on the subject matter, and the factors that influence the degree of their objectivity. Furthermore, the strength of qualitative research lies in its ability to provide information about the *human* side and its effectiveness in identifying intangible factors, such as social norms, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion.

The researcher chose the Grounded Theory approach to explore and collect data from the field and by systematic analysis to create a theory which explains that data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Shkedi 2003). This process makes it possible to turn hidden into visible knowledge, subconscious into conscious (Shkedi 2003). This approach enables the researcher to develop an inductively- derived grounded theory about a phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin 1990).

In addition, data collection of grounded theory enables the researcher to select subjects that maximize the potential to discover as many dimensions and conditions related to the phenomenon as possible (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The research method chosen is the «case study» since it examines selected aspects of human activity in a particular place and time (Stake 2000). Yosifon adds that the case study is a research approach that investigates certain patterns of human and organizational behavior to examine this behavior more deeply when the focus is on characters or groups of characters, in an attempt to understand their perception of certain events (Yosifon, 2001). This research sheds light on unique events that belong to the case. Its advantages are that it allows the researcher to be selective, while working in a rich environment that can potentially provide extensive information.

2.1 *The Study's Target Population*

The target population for this study includes professional literary translators of various pair of languages and backgrounds with wide experience in the field of literature and media. Ten translators were selected as experts in pair of languages such as German, Hebrew, Russian, English, Spanish, Arabic, Persian, Kurdish, Pashto, Urdu and Turkish.

2.2 *Data collection - Research tools*

The methods and tools used to collect data in this study are the researcher herself and her experience as a translator, open interviews, participatory observation, a questionnaire and the study of various literary and media documents. Using these tools, data acquired on translators' work enabled the collection of personal data, perspectives, and experiences; as well as hidden human behavior such as feelings, beliefs, and the thoughts of translators during their work, especially when translating sensitive topics. Data collection was conducted by the researcher and other translators from different countries via e-mail, face-to-face interviews and via Skype.

2.3 *Interviews*

Grounded Theory data collection is usually (but not exclusively) carried out through interviews. The data collection method used was by observations, informal conversation, group feedback analysis, or any other individual or group activity which could yield data (Dick 2005). In this study, nine open,

informal interviews were conducted in which the researcher instilled a sense of trust and facilitated the flow of free information (Spradley 1979).

The researcher designed the interview schedule as one of the data collection instruments for this study: the use of open-ended questions relating to the translator's objectivity, the barriers, challenges and other conflicts in their personal world preventing them from translating texts objectively. This method gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do. For example, the open interviews with Abed concerning literary translation from English to Arabic and from Arabic into Hebrew texts.

In this study, the participant's observations enabled the researcher to observe the translators and examine how each one dealt with the dilemmas and problems arising from the translators' perceptions during the translation work, and identify processes and difficulties, discover patterns of work and basic patterns of behavior (Sabar 1990).

Observation is an attractive tool in qualitative research since it allows the researcher to collect *live* data in *living* situations. The importance of observation lies in how it helps identify processes, difficulties and interactions in the translator's work process. A questionnaire was also handed out to some translators and all the collected data analyzed according to the *Grounded Theory* model and the *Integrated Approach* based on the Gestalt principle.

3. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

In this study, the findings were collected using various research tools to increase the internal validity of the study, based on the «Grounded Theory» (Strauss and Corbin, 1990)

The findings revealed that some translated literary and media works have different degrees of objectivity, pointing to the fact that their renditions depend greatly on the translators' personal point of view, incorporate their values, emotions toward the subject matter affecting their understanding, and their translation of the text based on personal choices during the process of translating.

From the findings and analysis of the data, we determine that there are factors stemming from the translator's attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and worldviews regarding the original text and its transmission to the target language. These difficulties result in a biased and impure translation of the translator. The study examines data and findings using research tools such as case studies, an open interview, a questionnaire and participant observation, and raises important points expressed by most of the translators who participated in the study.

An important factor relates the socio-cultural differences between the original language (SL) and the target language (TL). An analysis of a questionnaire given to translators and in interviews with expert literary translators in Arabic, observed that they did deal with challenges and dilemmas, and tried to detach themselves from the text and express it in the target language as much as possible without harming the creator's truth and beauty. They sometimes use an alternative word to refine a message inconsistent with their moral world explaining that Arabic is a rich and flexible language that allows them to make a substitution even though there is no perfect transfer from the target language to the source language.

Another factor found identical for all translators during the participated observation in which the researcher took an active part was the difficulty in translating a literary work from Russian into Hebrew. It appears that Russian uses commonly acceptable strong curses towards women in literary works, and one of the translators encountered great emotional and moral difficulty in transferring them to the target language. The translator manipulated the TL and tried to be objective, but the translator finally intervened personally in the text, with permission from the author, and thus overcame the difficulty. This

finding was a common dilemma among other translators in other foreign languages, such as Turkish which is considered more conservative.

Time is another factor that influences the translator's objectivity. This is especially important in dealing with a text that was common in some areas and belongs to a previous period. In another interview, a translator was required to translate a book from Arabic into English concerning the story of teenage girls who marry the elderly and very old men. The translator was asked to translate the book in a way that best describes the story of a group of beautiful 12-year old teenagers and how they are supposedly very happy to marry someone who is more than 30 years older, and they describe how they especially enjoy being a second or third wife to those men.

She expressed her great difficulty in terms of her personal world view on this complex issue and that, at the time the story was written, this subject was less sensitive and published in the world media, and felt that this issue should not be vaunted. She had special difficulty transmitting the work to English, not wanting to take credit for translating such a painful and loaded subject.

Another factor emerging from the findings was the influence of the author's personality, his style and attitude toward the subject. From observation, it became apparent that if the translator's attitude towards the subject was loaded and controversial due to personal experiences with the subject, this greatly influenced the translator's loyalty in conveying the message to the target language.

A translator was requested to translate a project that contained interviews and stories by a member of the Nazi Party from German to Hebrew. The translator found it difficult to cooperate on this project as it raised painful memories connected to his grandfather and grandmother, to the point that in certain parts he updated the stories in a way that would make him feel more at ease and would quiet his conscience.

Through participated observation, it was revealed that during the process of media translation, the translator must bring his multiple identities—as reader, interpreter, and writer—into full play. In other words, the translator should exchange views with the article in the SL, make full use of his aesthetic ability and imagination to concretize the indeterminacies and blankness in the source text in order to convey the message. When coming to the stage of presentation, the translator has to reproduce not only the meaning but also the aesthetic information and the flavor of the original. This is very difficult, especially in the Middle East where sensitive issues often involve political topics in English, Arabic and Hebrew, sometimes resulting in the translator being unable to remain neutral during the translation process. Normally, cultural focus is part of a translation problem; «there is a translation problem due to the cultural “gap” or a distance between the source and target languages» (Newmark, 1988).

On the other hand, in cases where translation problems arise from lack of equivalence at word level, the translator may replace the word in the target language (TL) which expresses the same meaning as the source language (SL) word, and the word he chose is his decision.

As for cultural problems in translations, another important finding that emerged from an interview and a questionnaire with a translator of Arabic poetry to Hebrew is a change of culture-related terms from the source language to the target language, from the translator's world. The translator translated the poetry of one of the Arab world's well-known poets. One of the lines reads in Arabic: «I saw 11 stars, and the sun and the moon worship him». He explained the change he made to this expression by the fact that there are culturally related terms and that in Hebrew, the target language, it is more acceptable and appropriate to use the term «bowing» rather than «worshiping». It seems that this change might have stemmed not only from the culture of the target language but from the translator being more comfortable with the term bowing.

Another finding was the lack of acceptance of certain content and the rejection of translations by translators due to difficulties stemming from the translator's beliefs, his views and values on subjects

such as politics, religion, and lack of in-depth information on the topic, or his disagreement with the subject or field.

A case study involved an interview with a translator from Hebrew to Spanish. The translator received a translation of a book on Jesus that used scientific facts to explain that he is not the Messiah. The translator is a religious Christian and a translation of this subject raised thoughts, objections, and a complex dilemma about how to transfer the entire book's message from Hebrew to Spanish when the book's content conflicts with his religious values. Finally, the translator rejected the work, explaining that he could not accept the work for fear of lack of objectivity and inability to translate the content for personal reasons.

These important findings about the factors that influence objectivity and the quality of translation to the TL help us improve our understanding of the translation process. It is sometimes influenced by social factors and the translator's personal worldview, what he encounters reading the text, in promotion of social justice or a particular agenda in various areas.

In light of the above, we can understand the importance of this research and why the field of translation studies is still evolving, bringing new ways and methods of translation especially effective within the multicultural society that we have today.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, to preserve the literary or media message, the translator must know beforehand the purpose of the message; this may enable him maintain objectivity and keep his own personal values and point of views at bay during the process of translation.

Based on the findings of this paper, it may be concluded that perfect objectivity is difficult to secure. However, this does not mean that the result is complete lack of objectivity. Literary and media translations have challenges and barriers related to language and culture between the SL and the TL, and the «bridge» the translator who comes to the process with a wide range of knowledge, beliefs, worldview has to cross, may become a barrier and render a bias translation. Dilemmas, barriers and challenges encountered by the translator may be detrimental to effective translation, as this is a symbiotic activity that involves not only the texts being translated but the one who does the translation. The study shows that any cultural or other barrier can be overcome by a translator's compromise or manipulation, but it must be done with full responsibility and objectivity, without identification and excessive intervention in the original text. This task is not simple and is a serious burden on translators and hence, the recommendation is to adhere as much as possible to the original message and meaning, and learn tools to preserve objectivity while translating sensitive cultural-social-literary texts with meaning and influence on readers in the TL. Translators should firstly put the original text into a melting-pot, and secondly, pour in the emotional reaction which translators have as readers. Then, to reproduce a new literary work, translators should unite consciousness of creativity and self-restraint and spare no effort to convey to the maximum the message and flavors the original text delivered (Fang, 2004).

The theory and the ensuing hypotheses will help create a more extensive and international scope to research this phenomenon. This requires the researcher ability to look at data through many lenses both as researcher and participant where data collection takes place over time and at different levels, thus ensuring meaningful results.

For a long time, the translator's subjectivity has not been recognized or permitted. The translator has only been allowed to exist as a «machine», effecting direct communication between author and reader. After recognition of the translator's inevitable subjectivity, he is asked to be subjective while making his individuality salient under condition of maximal conveyance of original content and style.

Meanwhile, due to the restrictions imposed on the translator's subjectivity, exaggerations of such subjectivity should be avoided and prohibited as well.

In conclusion, the translator's subjectivity is inevitable in the process of translation and should neither be ignored nor prohibited. Both the freedom and restrictions imposed on a translator's subjectivity are necessary. What should be carefully controlled are only its measures.

It is necessary to inspire new reflection on the importance of translators' responsibility in Translation Studies, in the T&I professions and in education and training. Hence, it is recommended to add supplementary courses on multiculturalism and multilingualism to translation programs, given the importance and the maintenance of original intangible cultural heritage text and its authors. It is equally necessary to teach how important it is to respect the author and his work when conveying his message to the target language, thus maintaining his unique voice without polishing, interfering too much with the text, and preserving the originality and beauty of the work, especially in literary translation.

In addition, it is recommended to incorporate in the course awareness of factors that delay or interfere with the translator during his work process, and how these factors are related to the translator's personality and inner world. Students should know in advance how to identify these factors and to manage them to achieve objectivity and quality in translation, much as a psychologist learns the technique of managing and maintaining a reasonable and impersonal distance from his patient, and how such a situation applies as well to a translator's personal distancing when he first meets the text.

REFERENCES

- Baydan, E. B. 2008. *Visibility of Translation through Conflicting Ideologies: The Islamic Retranslations of "100 Essential Readings"*. Istanbul, Diss. Boğaziçi U.
- Bielski, Marek y Joanna Bielska. 2008. «Analysing Medical Language: A Study of Polish/English Abstract Translations». In *English as an Additional Language in Research Publication and Communication*, ed. by Sally Burgess, and Pedro Martín-Martín. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang (Linguistic Insights, 61), 159-172.
- Cappai, Gabriele. 2003. «Einleitung: Übersetzung zwischen Kulturen als interdisziplinäre Aufgabe». in *Sozialwissenschaftliches Übersetzen als interkulturelle Hermeneutik / Il tradurre nelle scienze sociali come ermeneutica interculturale*, edited by A. Zingerle, G. Cappai. Milano, Berlin: Angeli/Duncker & Humblot, 11-29.
- Dick, B. «Grounded theory: A thumbnail sketch», Southern Cross University Website Accessed September 10, 2018 <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/grounded.htm>
- Fang, M. Z. 2004. *Translation studies and practice*. Qingdao: Qingdao Press.
- G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. 1967 *The Discovery of Grounded Theory Strategies for Qualitative Research*, New Jersey, Aldine Transaction
- Glaser, Barney G. 1978. *Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory*. Mill Valley, Ca.: Sociology Press.
- Mayoral Asensio, Roberto. 1999. *La traducción de la variación lingüística*. Soria: Diputación Provincial de Soria.
- Newmark, P. 1988. *A Textbook of Translation*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall
- Nida, E. 1993. *Language, culture and translation*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press.
- Robyns, Clem. 1990. «The Normative Model of Twentieth Century Belles Infidèles: Detective Novels in French Translation». In *Target International Journal of Translation Studies* 2 (1): 23–42.
- Sabar, N. 1990. *Qualitative research in teaching and learning*. Israel: Masada (in Hebrew).

- Seruya, Teresa, Lieven D'hulst, Alexandra Assis Rosa y Maria Lin Moniz. 2013. *Translation in Anthologies and Collections (19th and 20th Centuries)*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins (Benjamins Translation Library, 107).
- Shkedi, A. 2003. *Words That Try to Touch: Qualitative Research—Theory and Application*. Tel-Aviv: Ramot.
- Spradley, J.P. 1979. *The Ethnographic Interview*, Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Stake, R. E. 2000. «Case Studies». In, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* ed. by N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 435-453
- Strauss, A. and Corbin, L . 1990. *Basics of Grounded Theory Methods*. Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage.
- Strauss, A.L. and Corbin, J. 1998. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.
- Tytler, A. F. 2007. *Essay on the principles of translation*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Venuti, L. 1995. *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. London: Routledge.
- Yosifon, M. 2001. «Case study». In *Traditions and Currents in Qualitative Research* ed. by S. Ben-Yehoshua, Or Yehuda: Kinneret Zmora-Bitan Dvir, 257–306 (in Hebrew).